California Environmental Quality Act Environmental Checklist Form
Biological Resources, County of Ventura, Planning Division

PROJECT REFERENCE NO.: CUP-4911 Mod 1	**PROJECT PLANNER:** Paul Merrett
DATE: 18 Jan. 2000 Site visit on 14 Jan. 2000	**PROJECT BIOLOGIST:** Carl G. Thelander, BioResource Consultants; David L. Magney Environmental Consulting

PROJECT LOCATION: Approx. 500 ft. northo of intersection of Hwy 126 and Center Street, Piru.

PROJECT ADDRESS: 4375 Center Street, Piru

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT: Reopening of a motocross track with track configuration changes.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING: The project site is located on a south-facing slope within the Santa Clara River Valley, just east of Piru Creek.

The site consists of varying Santa Clara River Valley topography, from flat areas on the south side of the property, to nearly vertical cliffs on the north and northeast ends of the site. The remaining natural vegetation, which has not been cleared for motocross facilities, are dominated by Coastal Sage Scrub. The predominant shrubs of the Coastal Sage Scrub onsite include: California Sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), California Brickellbush (*Brickellia californica*), California Bush Sunflower (*Encelia californica*), California Buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum* var. *foliolosum*), Giant Wildrye (*Leymus condensatus*), Deerweed (*Lotus scoparius*), Chaparral Mallow (*Malacothamnus fasciculatus* var. *fasciculatus*), Purple Sage (*Salvia mellifera*), Shrubby Butterweed (*Senecio flaccidus* var. *douglasii*), and Our Lord's Candle (*Yucca whipplei*). Mulefat (*Baccharis salicifolia*) and Scalebroom (*Lepidospartum squamatum*) were also observed growing in wash (moister) areas of the site.

The ground layer plants (annual and perennial, herbaceous, and vine species), growing as an understory to the Coastal Sage Scrub shrub stratum, include: Narrowleaf Milkweed (*Asclepias fascicularis*), Antisell Three-pod Milkvetch (*Astragalus trichopodus* var. *phoxus*), Morning-glory (*Calystegia macrostegia* ssp. *cyclostegia*), Horseweed (*Conyza canadensis*), California Fuchsia (*Epilobium canum*), Wooly Everlasting (*Gnaphalium leucocephalum*), Cudweed-aster (*Lessingia filaginifolia*), and Manroot (*Marah fabaceus*).

Rock outcrops, consisting of large boulders and exposed bedrock, generally lack soil; however, the steep slopes at the north end of the property contain rock outcrops, with a cryptogamic soil crust (a rare, fungal and algal soil formation that is highly sensitive to disturbance), which provides habitat for California Fuchsia (*Epilobium canum*), California Buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum* var. *foliolosum*), the bryophyte Bigelow Spike Moss (*Selaginella bigelovii*), and Our Lord's Candle (*Yucca whipplei*). The rock outcrops onsite, and their hard surfaces, also provide substrate for the establishment and growth of nonvascular species of crustose (crust-like) and foliose (leaf-like) lichens. David Magney (1999) has prepared a listing of the rare lichens occurring in California (***Preliminary List of Rare California Lichens*, Bulletin of the California Lichen Society, *6[2]:22-27***), and it is probable that some rare species of lichen are growing on the rock outcrops onsite.

The vegetation and habitat of the property has been disturbed, substantially more than previously observed during a 1995 biological initial study, as a result of the development of additional trails. Invasive exotic plant species have readily established and colonized the disturbed areas of the

property, and they are expanding into adjacent native vegetation. Several herbaceous invasive exotic species that are of significant concern onsite include: Russian Knapweed (*Acroptilon repens*), annual grasses (*Bromus rubens, B. diandrus*), Tocalote (*Centaurea melitensis*), Bermuda Grass (*Cynodon dactylon*), Sweet Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*), Summer Mustard (*Hirschfeldia incana*), Cheeseweed (*Malva parviflora*), Tumbleweed (*Salsola tragus*), and Common Sow-thistle (*Sonchus oleraceus*). The invasive exotic shrubs and trees, including Tasmanian Blue Gum Eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus*), Tree Tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*), and Castor Bean (*Ricinus communis*), are also of concern onsite.

Wildlife occurrence and abundance are consistent with coastal sage scrub habitat for the region. No reproductive activity is underway at this time of year. Additional surveys during the spring months may provide additional information on the importance of the area to nesting birds, including the California gnatcatcher, a federally listed (threatened) species.

The general area is outside of the area considered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to support nesting California gnatcatchers. However, there are historical nesting records for the species in the Santa Paula/Fillmore area. Since suitable habitat for this species is present on the slopes above the existing tracks, additional loss of coastal sage habitat should be avoided. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has discretion over whether surveys for this endangered species are required using standardized protocols. That agency should be contacted for a determination whether or not specific surveys are required for the applicant and the CUP to comply with the federal Endangered Species Act.

No unique or sensitive wildlife habitat elements were noted at the site. We noted mule deer tracks, a species likely to be displaced when the facility is operational. There were signs of coyotes, and possibly bobcats using the dry wash area. We noted signs of woodrat activity. The area is within the range of the San Diego desert woodrat (*Neotoma lepida intermedia*). This is a species of special concern and it occurs in arid coastal sage scrub habitat. Potential habitat for the species is present, thus supporting the recommendation that no new areas of coastal sage scrub be degraded.

IV. BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES:	PROJECT IMPACT DEGREE OF EFFECT[1]				CUMULATIVE IMPACT DEGREE OF EFFECT			
What level of impact will the proposal have on:	**N**	**LS**	**PS-M**	**PS**	**N**	**LS**	**PS-M**	**PS**
A. Endangered, Threatened, or Rare Species			x				x	
B. Wetland Habitat	x				x			
C. Coastal Habitat	x				x			
D. Migration Corridors	x				x			
E. Locally Important Species/Communities				x				x
Will the proposal:								
a) Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species in local or regional plans, policies, ore regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Game or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?				x				x
b) Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations or by the California Department of Fish and Game or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?				x				x
c) Have a substantial adverse effect on federally protected wetland as defined by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means?	x				x			
d) Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites?	x				x			
e) Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?	x				x			
f) Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?	x				x			

[1] N = No Impact; LS = Less Than Significant; PS-M = Potentially Significant Impact Unless Mitigation Incorporated; PS = Potentially Significant Impact.

Additional comments or explanations:

IV.a. No special-status plant species were observed during the field study; however, a search of the RareFind 2 Natural Diversity Data Base (NDDB 1999 [California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California]) revealed that several special-status plant species are known to occur in the vicinity of the project site, including Plummer's Mariposssa Lily (*Calochhhortus plummerae*), San Fernando Valley Spineflower (*Chorizanthe parryi* var. *fernandina*), Slender-horned Spineflower (*Dodecahema leptoceras*), Palmer Grapplinghook (*Harpagonella palmeri*), Santa Susana Tarplant (*Hemizonia minthornnii*), California Orcutt Grass (*Orcuttia californica*), and Lyon Pentachaeta (*Pentachaeta lyonii*).

The project site is dominated by Coastal Sage Scrub, which is considered a habitat type at risk, resulting from significant and substantial losses (primarily due to clearing and development) regionally and statewide. Coastal Sage Scrub is also habitat to several special-status species that are known to occur in the vicinity of the project site (NDDB 1999 [CDFG]), including Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia* [burrow sites]), San Diego Desert Woodrat (*Neoyoma lepida intermedia* [species of concern]), San Diego Horned Lizard (*Phrynosoma coronatum blainvillei* [species of concern]), and the federally listed California Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica* [threatened]).

IV.b. Coastal Sage Scrub is considered a sensitive habitat type both regionally and statewide. The project has already caused, and would cause, further impacts to this sensitive habitat type by vegetation clearing.

Recommendations:

IV.a. Seasonal field surveys for botanical resources need to be conducted to determine whether special-status plant species are present onsite. At least two field surveys are recommended, one in March or early April, and another in May or early June, to capture the periods that most plants are identifiable (in bloom and fruit). The botanical surveys should be floristic in nature and should include vascular and nonvascular plants.

A floristic lichen survey should be conducted to determine whether special-status lichens occur onsite. Lichens are known to be sensitive to air pollution and excessive dust, both of which will be produced by the proposed project.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service should be contacted for a determination of whether or not protocol-level surveys for California gnatcatchers is warranted. Surveys for woodrat use and a determination as to the species present may also be required as part of the CUP conditions.

IV.b. The existing facilities represent an expansion from previous conditional use permit conditions of 1995, which clearly state that no new motocross trails would be developed. The biological assessment at that time determined that the project would result in less-than-significant impacts, except for dust-related impacts to adjacent vegetation. Current conditions show that the facilities have been expanded, resulting in direct and indirect impacts to sensitive Coastal Sage Scrub vegetation, which should have been considered significant both as direct and cumulative impacts. No mitigation

for the loss of this sensitive habitat was required at the time since no additional direct impacts were expected; however, this impact should be mitigated for by revegetation either onsite or at another suitable site in the Santa Clara River Valley.

All trail facilities should be restored to natural conditions and revegetated after the motocross facility has been abandoned or otherwise not used as intended in this CUP. To ensure sufficient funds are available to conduct the revegetation measures, a bond, escrow account, or letter of credit should be required in sufficient amount to adequately fund full-site restoration and mitigation monitoring.

Development of additional trails onsite resulted in disturbed Coastal Sage Scrub habitat, which has been invaded by many non-native plant species; and the invasive exotic species are expanding into adjacent native vegetation. The introduced species of significant concern, which were observed onsite and that are listed above in the Environmental Setting, need to be controlled, over time, using methods of eradication and removal. These measures are imperative to ensure low competition levels for the important native Coastal Sage Scrub plant species, required for increased wildlife habitat functions, and to ensure a rich and diverse flora of the area in the future.

D. MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE Based on the information contained with Section B6:	**Yes/Maybe**	**No**
1. Does the project have the potential to degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal, or eliminate important examples of major periods of California's history or prehistory?	x	
2. Does the project have the potential to achieve short-term, to the disadvantage of long-term, environmental goals? (A short-term impact on the environment is one that occurs in a relatively brief, definitive period of time while long-term impacts will endure well into the future.)		x
3. Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? "Cumulatively considerable" means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effect of other current projects, and the effect of probable future projects. (Several projects may have relatively small individual impacts on two or more resources, but that total of those impacts on the environment is significant.)	x	
4. Does the project have environmental effects that will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?		x

E. DETERMINATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT:

On the basis of this initial evaluation:

[ ]	I find the proposed project COULD NOT have a significant effect on the environment, and a NEGATIVE DECLARATION should be prepared.
[x]	I find that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environmental, there would not be a significant effect in this case because the mitigation measure(s) described in section C of the Initial Study will be applied to the project, A MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION should be prepared.
[ ]	I find the proposed project, individually and/or cumulatively, MAY have a significant effect on the environmental, and an ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required.
[ ]	I find that the proposed project MAY have a "potentially significant impact" or "potentially significant unless mitigated" impact on the environmental, but at least on e effect 1) has been adequately analyzed in and earlier document pursuant to applicable legal standards, and 2) has been addressed by mitigation measures based on the earlier analysis as described on attached sheets. An ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required, but it must analyze only the effects that remain to be addressed.
[ ]	I find that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment, because all potentially significant effects (a) have been analyzed adequately in an earlier EIR or NEGATIVE DECLARATION pursuant to applicable standards, and (b) have been avoided or mitigated pursuant to that earlier EIR or NEGATIVE DECLARATION, including revisions or mitigation measures that are imposed upon the proposed project, nothing further is required.

Carl G. Thelander

1/18/2000
Date